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RHMFIISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/09/2022

TAGS: PREL PTER MOPS TU IZ

SUBJECT: ANKARA PUK REP OUTLINES TALABANI'S EFFORTS TO DEFUSE TURKEY-BARZANI CONFLICT

REF: A. ANKARA 822

1B. ANKARA 812

Classified By: PolCouns Janice G. Weiner for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S/NF) Summary: Iraqi President Talabani will work to defuse Turkey-KRG tensions, according to the PUK representative in Ankara. Talabani will seek to create breathing room for PM Erdogan and his ruling AKP party to weather the political storm of presidential and parliamentary elections, as he has apparently calculated that an AKP government is in both Iraqi and KRG interests. Pro-Kurdish DTP party leader Turk will reportedly visit Talabani in late April; they will work together to persuade the PKK to maintain its unilateral ceasefire. End summary.

12. (C) The PUK's representative to Turkey, Bahros Galali, reviewed for us April 10 his interventions with Iraqi President Talabani to seek to defuse fresh tensions between Turkey and KRG President Barzani following Barzani's Al-Arabiyah interview, which was broadcast April 6 (but, we have learned from Embassy Baghdad, actually recorded on Feb. 27). Galali told us he noted Turkish anger at Barzani's comments -- in which he warned Turkey to stay out of Kirkuk or he will meddle in Turkey's affairs -- and called Talabani April 9 to urge him to calm to situation. According to Galali, Talabani had already planned to call PM Erdogan, apologize for Barzani's remarks, and reaffirm Iraq's friendship with Turkey.

13. (C) Galali told us that Talabani called him later April 9 and gave him a readout of his conversation with Erdogan. Erdogan reportedly expressed appreciation for Talabani taking the initiative in calling him, and asked that Talabani do all he can to get Barzani to calm down the rhetoric. Erdogan also expressed annoyance that the GOI had shifted the venue for the "neighbors-plus" ministerial to Egypt. Talabani apparently assured Erdogan that Turkey should not interpret this decision as a slap in the face. However, Galali told us that the Iraqi cabinet was more or less united in not wanting the meeting in Istanbul, for fear that Turkey would attempt to dictate an outcome on the Kirkuk issue.

¶4. (C) Galali said he explained to Talabani that Erdogan is in a delicate political situation, and persuaded Talabani that it is in both Iraqi and KRG interests that Erdogan (or another ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) politician) become president, and that the AKP remain in power following parliamentary elections later this year. Galali believes that only Erdogan's party can maintain a good relationship with the KRG and take genuine steps to solve the PKK situation through other than solely military means. Galali added that Talabani will seek to dispatch FonMin Zebari to persuade Barzani to make some sort of positive gesture to Turkey. We suggested that a positive statement -- as well as even a symbolic move on the PKK issue -- would do much to calm the waters here. Galali also expressed appreciation for the Department Spokesman's April 9 remarks characterizing Barzani's comments as unhelpful.

¶5. (S/NF) Galali reported that pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) leader Ahmet Turk will visit Talabani in Suleimaniyah at the end of April, and that Turk and Talabani will work to persuade the PKK leadership there to maintain its unilateral ceasefire. Galali said that Talabani believes it is crucial that the ceasefire remain in place, especially during this delicate political season in Turkey. Significant PKK violence would only ratchet up tensions further.

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